

"THE WAY OF JESUS"
VI. In Failure

INTRODUCTION On these Sunday mornings in Lent this year, we have been considering the way of Jesus - His way in dealing with people, His way in facing certain life situations. Today, we turn to consider his way in failure.

DEVELOPMENT The events of Palm Sunday provide us with a starting point. We so often look upon Palm Sunday as a day of great joy. The traditional symbols are singing children and beautiful palm branches. We speak of a royal welcome, of a triumphal entry. And yet, when all is said and done, there is a deep sadness underlying Palm Sunday. It is the sadness of something good, something glorious being rejected, being refused. For many in Jerusalem it was a day of frustration and confusion. For as that day came to an end, there were those who already were planning and plotting how to get rid of this man who had come into their city riding on a donkey. As that day came to a close, the Son of Man already was feeling a sense of failure and discouragement.

REJECTION BY THE LEADERS To begin with, the leaders of the people were not ready to accept him. They rejected his ideas. They refused to make the necessary changes that he was asking them to make. Jesus had left the comparative safety of Galilee to come to Jerusalem in a dangerous and final bid for acceptance. Jerusalem was the religious capital of the nation. If anyone wished to speak to the nation, that was the place to do it.

He entered Jerusalem not on a war charger, but riding on a donkey. He was a man of peace, a man of deep humility. The kingdom he was offering to the nation was not based upon violence or military conquest or power or narrow nationalism, but rather it would evolve out of deeds of love and mercy. If they were to follow his ways everything would have to be changed from top to bottom. He was rejected. The following lines describe their rejection:

"They pluck their palm branches and hail him as King,
Early on Sunday.
They spread out their garments; hosannas they sing,
Early on Sunday.
But where is the noise of their hurrying feet,
The crown they would offer, the sceptre, the seat?
Their King wanders hungry, forgot in the street,
Early on Monday".

REJECTION BY HIS FOLLOWERS Then, too, we find that his followers, his friends, his disciples rejected the meaning of discipleship. How their hearts must have been lifted on Palm Sunday morning as He made his way into the city in the midst of the cheering throngs. At long last, success seemed close at hand. The many months of following him in Galilee now were to be crowned with triumph. How their hearts must have sank when they began to realize that this was not to be the case. Their dismay, their frustration and even their opposition must have hurt him deeply when he tried to let them see that he was not coming to Jerusalem as a conquering Messiah. This is what they wanted - a conquering Messiah, not a suffering and humble Messiah. They were unprepared for this. After three years, they still didn't understand what he was trying to get across to them.

We think of Judas. We tend to look upon him as a monstrous traitor - selfish, greedy, despicable. But I wonder if it might not be more in keeping with the New Testament account to picture him as a man who had dedicated his life to a great cause and then was suddenly pathetically disillusioned. Some sympathetic interpretations of

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However, we need to understand that psychology...

~~We do not welcome failure simply because our anxiety will then drive us to seek strength from beyond.~~ At the same time, we must understand that psychology, sociology, and the other developing sciences of man cannot give us the ultimate answers when we are confronted not only by our failures of achievement, but also by our deep, inner, moral defeats. Mechanistic concepts eventually reach a point of diminishing return, and we yearn for the spiritual dimension. We seek the ultimate answers. And it is true, is it not, upon self-examination, that most of our best qualities, our deepest wisdom, our greatest attainments have been born out of the anguish of adversity and defeat? Failure, as a form of crisis, can be the means by which God deepens us and makes us more of a blessing to others. ~~A sense of failure can often call a person to live life on a deeper level.~~

Paul, the Apostle, you may recall had a weakness which he described as a thorn in the flesh. We do not know just what it was. Various explanations have been given as to what it was, but our understanding is incomplete. Listen to these words written by Paul:

"And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh. A messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities: for when I am weak, then I am strong".

"For when I am weak, then I am strong". These are words of fire. Failure can deepen us, if we let, it, until we know a power and a strength that we did not think possible.

CLOSING The humiliation of rejection. The heartache of failure. Jesus began to experience these as the shadows of the night came over Jerualem on that first Palm Sunday. He slipped through the city gates and retired to nearby Bethany. But, before that week was over, he had grown inwardly - and as he faeedthe bitterness of betrayal, the agony of Gethsemane, the disappointment of disloyalty, the cruelty of the cross - in the great mystery of it all, he triumphed. Man did not have the last word.

LET US PRAY As we try to follow our Lord and Master into the city where he was hailed as a king, help us, O God, to show forth in our lives something of his incomparable spirit, something of his great way, that people seeing us may be renewed in confidence and courage and know that once again thou hast triumphed. Amen